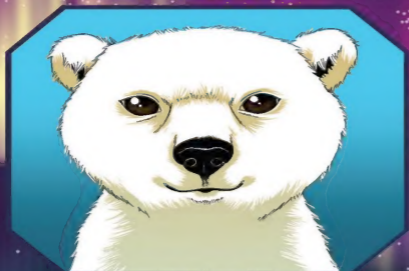


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SEEKERS

KALLIK'S ADVENTURE



ERIN HUNTER

SEEKERS

KALLIK'S
ADVENTURE



Seekers: Kallik's Adventure

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First Edition

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CREATED BY
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HAMBURG // LONDON // LOS ANGELES // TOKYO

HARPER

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HUDSON BAY.
LATE SUMMER.

JUST A
LITTLE MORE...



...JUST A
LITTLE
LONGER...



...AND WE'LL
HAVE A NICE,
COMFORTABLE DEN.

UNLESS I GET TOO
HUNGRY TO DIG, WHICH
I ALMOST AM.

BUT I KNOW THE
ICE IS GOING TO COME BACK
SOON...AND WHEN IT DOES,
THEN I'LL CATCH A FAT, JUICY
SEAL, RIGHT OUT OF AN
ICE HOLE.


JUST AS SOON AS
THE
ICE COMES BACK.




WHENEVER THAT IS.



MAYBE I SHOULD
TELL YOU A STORY.



WOULD YOU LIKE THAT,
MY LITTLE CUBS?



MAYBE ONE
ABOUT ...



"...THE GREAT BEAR."

"SHE CAME FIRST. YOU SEE?
SHE WAS THE FIRST BEAR.
AND SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL,
AND POWERFUL."

"BUT HUNTERS CAME AFTER
THE GREAT BEAR. THEY
CALLED THEMSELVES ROBIN,
CHICKADEE, AND MOOSE BIRD."



"THE HUNTERS CHASED
HER AROUND THE
PATHWAY STAR."

...ROUND
AND ROUND.

AND SHE TRIED
TO ESCAPE. SHE
TRIED SO HARD.

"BUT THEY CAUGHT HER."






THEY CAUGHT HER, AND HER
BLOOD SPILLED OUT OVER
THE EARTH.

...AND TURNED THE
LEAVES RED
AND ORANGE.




THE GREAT BEAR TRIED TO
FIGHT, BUT HER WOUNDS
WERE TOO GREAT.

AND SHE DIED.



I PRAY THAT THE GREAT
BEAR WILL RISE AGAIN, AND COME
BACK TO THE LIVING, FOR WHEN
SHE DOES, THE ICE WILL
RETURN.


AND WE SHALL
BE SAFE.



JUST AS I PRAY THAT
YOU WILL BE STRONG AND
HEALTHY, MY BEAUTIFUL
CUBS.

A polar bear is sitting in a cave, looking directly at the viewer. The cave walls are rocky and textured.

MY PRECIOUS,
BEAUTIFUL CUBS.

A close-up of a polar bear's head, looking upwards and to the right. The bear's fur is white and detailed with fine lines.

YOU'LL BE BIG AND STRONG
ENOUGH TO LEAVE THE DEN
BEFORE WE SEE THE ICE.

A close-up of a polar bear's head, looking downwards and to the right. The bear's fur is white and detailed with fine lines.

BEFORE WE
GO BACK...

A polar bear is lying down in a cave, looking up at the sky. The cave walls are rocky and textured.

...HOME.

FOUR MONTHS LATER.





MAMA...MAMA
ARE YOU ASLEEP?

MAMA?



SHE'S
ASLEEP...!



WATCH ME! WATCH
WHAT I CAN DO!

ARE YOU
WATCHING?

MY NAME IS
KALLIK.

THAT'S MY MAMA.
HER NAME IS NISA.

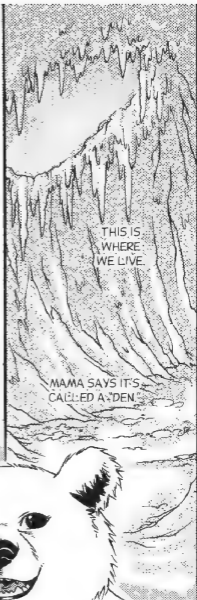


SEE? SEE WHAT
I CAN DO?



THIS IS
WHERE
WE LIVE

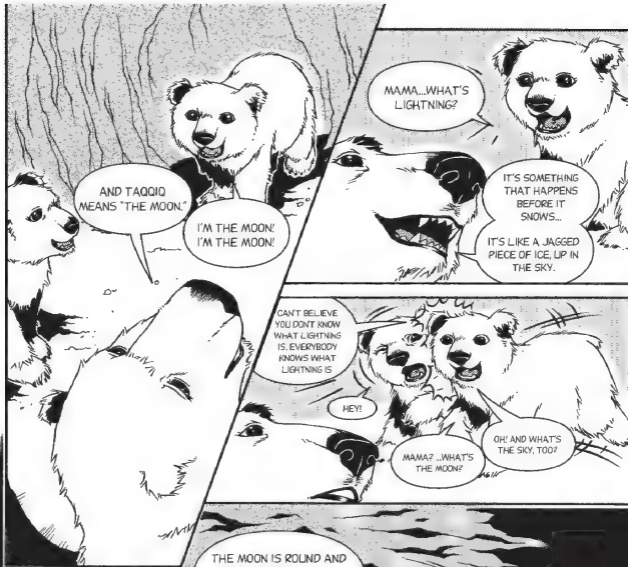
MAMA SAYS IT'S
CALLED A'DEN



AND THAT'S
MY BROTHER,
TAQIQ.







AND TAQQIQ
MEANS "THE MOON."

I'M THE MOON!
I'M THE MOON!

MAMA...WHAT'S
LIGHTNING?

IT'S SOMETHING
THAT HAPPENS
BEFORE IT
SNOWS...

IT'S LIKE A JAGGED
PIECE OF ICE, UP IN
THE SKY.

CAN'T BELIEVE
YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT LIGHTNING
IS. EVERYBODY
KNOWS WHAT
LIGHTNING IS

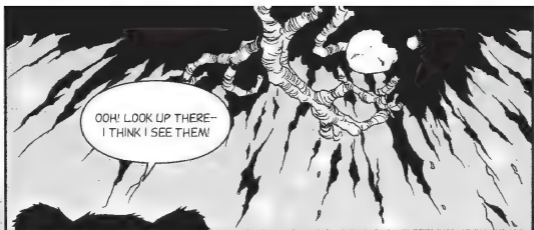
HEY!

MAMA? ...WHAT'S
THE MOON?

OH! AND WHAT'S
THE SKY, TOO?

THE MOON IS ROUND AND
WHITE, AND IT GLOWS,
UP IN THE SKY WITH
THE LIGHTNING.

THE SKY IS FAR, FAR
ABOVE OUR HEADS.
IT'S LIKE THE ROOF
OF THE WORLD.



OOH! LOOK UP THERE--
I THINK I SEE THEM!



THERE, THAT JAGGED
THING! IS THAT
LIGHTNING?

AND THERE'S
THE MOON, RIGHT
BESIDE IT!

I THINK...I CAN TOUCH
THE MOON...IF I JUMP
REALLY HIGH...


IT'S LUCKY
YOU DIDN'T HAVE
MORE OF US, MAMA!

YOU MIGHT'VE
RUN OUT OF THINGS
TO NAME US!



COME HERE...
COME HERE,
YOU TWO.

TIME TO GET
SOME SLEEP.



I LOVE SLEEPING
AGAINST MAMA'S BELLY.
IT MAKES NICE RUMBLE
NOISES.



TAGGIG
QUIT IT!

I'M JUST
TRYING TO GET
COMFORTABLE!

WELL, YOU'RE GETTING
COMFORTABLE WITH
A CLAW IN MY BACK!

SO QUIT IT!


OOF...!





YOU STARTED IT!


NUH-UH, YOU
STARTED IT!



I CAN SEE
YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE
FALLING ASLEEP.

MAYBE IT WOULD HELP
IF I TOLD YOU A STORY.
DO YOU THINK THAT
WOULD HELP?

YES, MA'AM.



YOU TWO DON'T
REALIZE IT YET, BUT
THERE'S A WHOLE WORLD
OUTSIDE OF THIS DEN.

REALLY?




YOU BETTER
BELIEVE IT.

THERE ARE OTHER
BEARS...AND SEALS...


AND ICE. LOTS AND
LOTS OF BEAUTIFUL,
PURE WHITE ICE AND
SNOW.

THE SAME COLOR
AS YOUR FUR.



AND THE SKY--NOT THE
ROOF OF OUR DEN, THE REAL
SKY--IS HUGE, AND AT NIGHT
IT'S ALL BLACK...

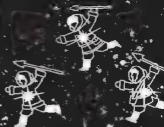
...BUT IT'S FILLED WITH TINY
CHIPS OF ICE CALLED STARS,
WHICH SHINE WITH THE
SPIRITS OF BEARS THAT
HAVE DIED.



AND THE STARS MOVE...
ALL EXCEPT FOR ONE.
THE PATHWAY STAR.

EVERY WHITE BEAR
KNOWS THE PATHWAY
STAR. IT'S HOW WE
FIND OUR WAY.

EVEN THE THREE HUNTERS
ROBIN, CHAKADEE, AND MOOSE
BRO--PURSUE THE GREAT BEAR
AROUND THE PATHWAY STAR.



IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT
NEVER EVER CHANGES.



WOW...

I CAN'T WAIT
TO SEE THE
STARS!



WE STAY IN THE DEN
FOR A LONG TIME.

MAMA SAYS WE'RE STAYING
INSIDE UNTIL TAQQIQ AND I
ARE BIG ENOUGH TO GO OUT.


I HOPE IT'LL
BE SOON.

OH, WILL YOU
TWO BE STILL?


I CAN'T GET
A MOMENT'S
PEACE!

TAQQIQ AND I GET OUR MILK
FROM MAMA...BUT SHE SAYS SHE'S
GETTING HUNGRY FOR OUTSIDE FOOD.


WITH HER HUNGRY, AND US
BIGGER, I GUESS IT'S GETTING
SORT OF TIGHT IN HERE.



MAMA'S NOT GIVING
US AS MUCH MILK
AS SHE USED TO...



...AND WE HAVE TO
POKE HER BELLY NOW
TO GET ANY AT ALL.



A LOT OF THE TIME TAGQIQ
GETS MORE MILK THAN I DO,
'CAUSE HE'S STRONGER.



THAT'S NOT
FAIR AT ALL.

HEY!
QUIT IT!

WELL, MOVE
OVER, THEN! I'M
HUNGRY, TOO!



BUT THEN...
ONE DAY...

...EVERYTHING CHANGED.

ALL RIGHT,
LISTEN, YOU TWO.

IT'S TIME.
I'M GOING TO GO
OUTSIDE AND HUNT.

CAN WE GO HUNTING
WITH YOU? CAN WE?

YEAH! CAN WE?
PLEASE PLEASE
PLEASE?

NO.

YOU'RE TOO YOUNG AND
TOO SMALL. YOU NEED
TO STAY HERE.



TAKE US
WITH YOU!

NO.

WE'LL BE
GOOD! WE
PROMISE!

NO.

PLEASE PLEASE
PLEASE PLEASE?

NO.



YOU'RE BOTH
STAYING HERE.
I MEAN IT.

I WOULDN'T EVEN
BE GOING IF I DIDN'T
HAVE TO.



NOW
STAND BACK.



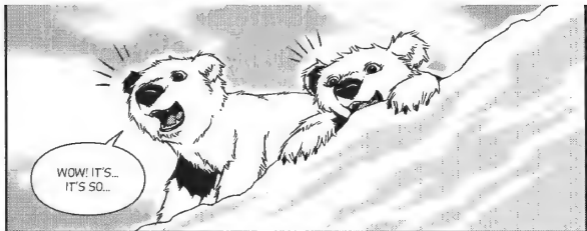
SKRACK



WELL.
THERE IT IS.

THE OUTSIDE
WORLD.

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?



WOW! IT'S...
IT'S SO...

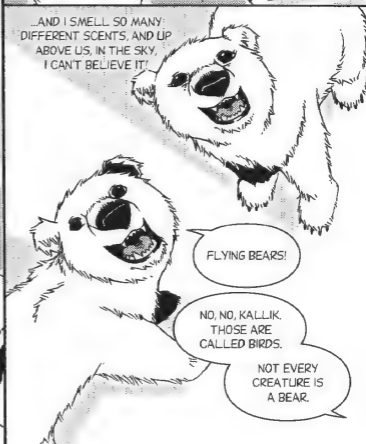


HUGE!

I DON'T EVEN KNOW
WHAT TO THINK.
THERE'S SO MUCH!

THERE AREN'T ANY STARS.
MAMA SAYS THAT'S ONLY AT
NIGHT. BUT I HEAR SOUNDS, LIKE
HUFFING AND GRUNTING...


...AND I SMELL SO MANY
DIFFERENT SCENTS, AND UP
ABOVE US, IN THE SKY,
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!



FLYING BEARS!

NO, NO, KALLIK.
THOSE ARE
CALLED BIRDS.

NOT EVERY
CREATURE IS
A BEAR.




LET US COME
WITH YOU! OH, MAMA,
THERE'S SO MUCH
TO SEE!

LET US COME
EXPLORING WITH
YOU, MAMA, PLEASE
PLEASE PLEASE?

NO. YOU'RE
TOO SMALL.

AND FROM THE
SOUNDS OF IT, THERE
MAY BE SOME CREATURES
NEARBY WHO AREN'T
VERY FRIENDLY.



PROMISE ME THAT
YOU'LL STAY IN OUR
NICE WARM DEN WHILE
I'M GONE. ALL RIGHT?

OKAY,
MAMA.

DON'T FOLLOW
ME. NO MATTER
WHAT. OKAY?

WE PROMISE.



I'LL BE BACK
AS SOON AS
I CAN.



THERE.

NOW NO ONE
WILL KNOW
YOU'RE HERE.



SO WE
JUST...WAIT
HERE, THEN.

THAT'S WHAT
MAMA SAID
TO DO.

...I HOPE SHE'S NOT
GONE TOO LONG.



DON'T WORRY,
LITTLE SISTER!
I'M HERE!

I'LL TAKE
CARE OF US
BOTH!

OH YEAH?



WELL, MAYBE
I'LL TAKE CARE
OF YOU!

NUH-UH!
I'M A GREAT
BIG WHITE BEAR!
I'M FIERCE!

HA HA HA...
I'M FIERCER-ER
THAN YOU!

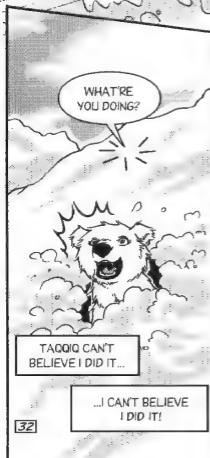


WHOA...DID YOU HEAR
THAT? IT CAME FROM
OUTSIDE!

WHAT DO
YOU THINK IT IS?

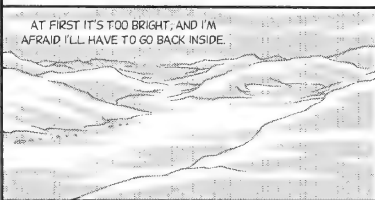
I THINK IT'S A GIANT BIRD!
AND ITS FAVORITE FOOD IS
LITTLE GIRL BEARS!

YOU'RE CRAZY!
I THINK IT'S A HUNTER, LIKE
THE ONES THAT CHASE
THE GREAT BEAR!

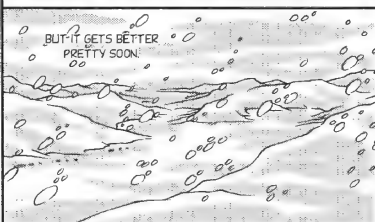





IT'S SO BRIGHT.



AT FIRST IT'S TOO BRIGHT, AND I'M
AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO GO BACK INSIDE.



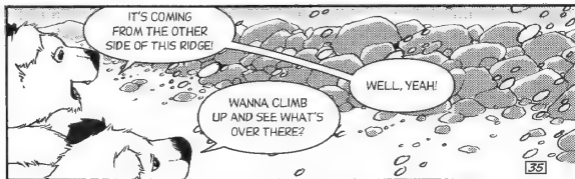
BUT IT GETS BETTER
PRETTY SOON.



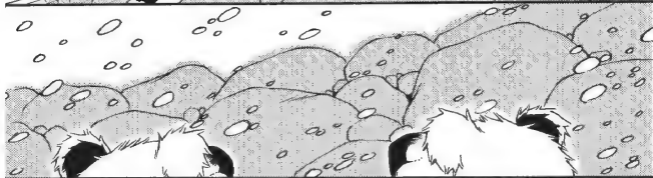
WELL, I CAN'T
LET YOU GO OUT THERE
BY YOURSELF!

WHO'D
PROTECT YOU?












ARKH! ARKH!




THAT'S ONE
WEIRD BEAR.

HE'S JUST
DIFFERENT,
IS ALL!

SEE, HE SPEAKS
A DIFFERENT
LANGUAGE!




...PLUS, HE SMELLS
REALLY GOOD!



HE'S GOT NO
LEGS! OR FUR! HOW
DOES HE WALK?



ARKH?
GURKH GURKH!

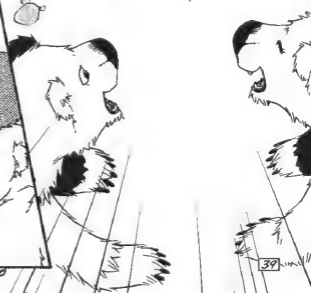



WOW...HE'S CUTE!
I WONDER IF HE LIKES
TO PLAY?

HOW CAN WE
ASK HIM, IF HE CAN'T
UNDERSTAND US?




WE DECIDE TO CALL HIM
MUDDY, 'CAUSE HE'S THE
SAME COLOR AS MUD



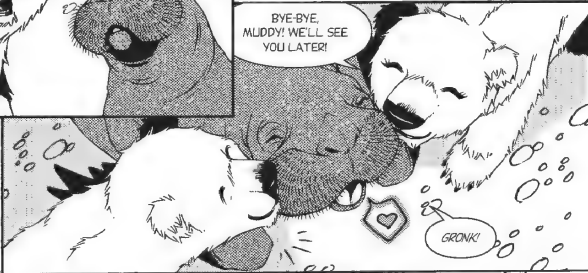


WE PLAY AND PLAY AND PLAY...
UNTIL ONE OF THE
STRANGE SOUNDS WE HEARD
BEFORE COMES BACK.

IT'S REALLY LOUD...



...AND IT MEANS
MUDDY HAS TO GO.



BYE-BYE,
MUDDY! WE'LL SEE
YOU LATER!

GRONK!



THAT WAS
SO MUCH FUN!

YEAH.

BUT WE'D BETTER
GO BACK TO THE DEN, BEFORE
MAMA REALIZES WE DIDN'T DO
WHAT SHE TOLD US TO.



PHEW!

SHE'S NOT
BACK YET!

HERE, LET'S
PUT THE SNOW BACK
LIKE SHE HAD IT.

YEAH—
GOOD IDEA.

I HOPE WE
GET TO SEE
MUDDY AGAIN.

BEFORE WE CAN EVEN GET SETTLED
DOWN, MAMA COMES IN. WE MADE
IT BACK JUST IN TIME!

AND SHE'S COVERED IN THE
SAME SMELL. MUDDY HAS!

THERE ARE
MY PRECIOUS
LITTLE CUBS!

ME TOO.

WHO ARE THE
PERFECT LITTLE BEARS
WHO DID JUST AS
THEY WERE TOLD?



UH...

MAMA, WHAT'S
THAT SMELL? IT'S
WONDERFUL!

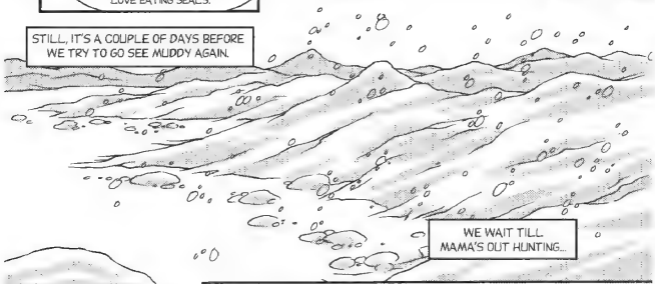
THAT'S FISH, LITTLE
LIGHTNING. WHITE BEARS EAT
A LOT OF FISH. WE LOVE IT...
ALMOST AS MUCH AS WE
LOVE EATING SEALS.



I KNOW IT'S WRONG, LETTING MAMA
THINK WE STAYED HERE... BUT, I
THINK SHE WOULD BE RELEASED
THAT WE MADE A NEW FRIEND!

SHE ALWAYS SAYS,
"PLAY NICE!" AND WE DID.

STILL, IT'S A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE
WE TRY TO GO SEE MUDDY AGAIN.

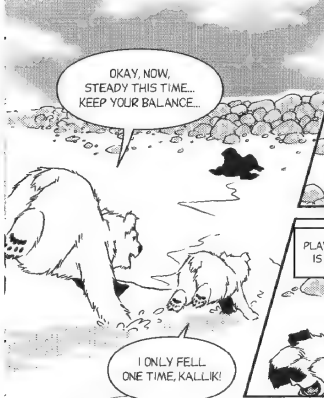


WE WAIT TILL
MAMA'S OUT HUNTING...



IS SHE
GONE?

I DON'T SEE
HER ANYWHERE.



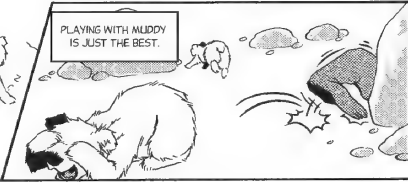
OKAY, NOW,
STEADY THIS TIME...
KEEP YOUR BALANCE...



HEY, LOOK!
THERE HE IS!

HI,
MUDDY!

GRONK!




PLAYING WITH MUDDY
IS JUST THE BEST.



I ONLY FELL
ONE TIME, KALLIK!



HE'S SO MUCH FUN...



...AND HE KNOWS
ALL THE BEST GAMES!



EVEN IF HE DOESN'T ALWAYS
PLAY THEM THE BEST.

READY...SET...

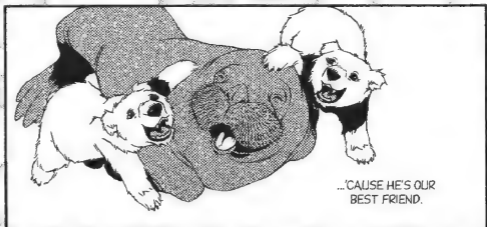


GRONK!

...GO!

ESPECIALLY WHEN WE'RE RACING,
SOMETIMES TAQQIO AND I SLOW DOWN
A LITTLE SO MUDDY CAN WIN.

IT'S NOT HIS FAULT HIS KIND OF BEAR
DOESN'T HAVE PROPER LEGS. WE
WANT HIM TO FEEL GOOD...



... 'CAUSE HE'S OUR
BEST FRIEND.

IT'S A SHAME WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND
WHAT HE SAYS, BUT I DON'T THINK
THAT MATTERS TOO MUCH.



WHENEVER WE GO DOWN TO
THE ROCKS, HE'S EITHER RIGHT
THERE WAITING FOR US...



...OR HE COMES AS SOON
AS WE CALL FOR HIM.



MUDDY!
MUUUUUDDY!

ARE YOU
THERE?

PLAYING WITH
MUDDY IS GREAT...





...BUT LEARNING FROM
MAMA IS EVEN BETTER!

ALL RIGHT, YOU
TWO...I'VE GOT A
TREAT FOR YOU.



I CAUGHT
A SEAL!

IT'S NICE AND
FRESH, SO DIG IN!

OH, MAMA, THIS
IS THE BEST-TASTING
THING EVER!

DON'T YOU
THINK SO, TAQQIQ?

NHM NRM
CHOMP GLUMP!


WELL, LET ME
TELL YOU HOW WE
CAN GET MORE OF IT...

MAMA TELLS US ALL ABOUT SEAL HUNTING...
ALL THE SITTING BESIDE A HOLE IN THE ICE,
WAITING TO GRAB ONE WHEN IT COMES UP FOR AIR.

I'M GONNA BE A GREAT SEAL
HUNTER! I'LL CATCH LOTS AND
LOTS OF THEM!

SEE? I'M WAITING
BY AN ICE HOLE!
SEE? ARE YOU
WATCHING?

I WONDER IF MUDDY EATS
SEALS, TOO? ...I CAN'T THINK
OF HOW TO ASK HIM.



THE NEXT DAY WE GO TO MEET HIM—
WE'VE BEEN WORKING ON WAYS TO TRY
TO TALK TO HIM BETTER...

...BUT HE'S NOT
HERE AGAIN.

GUESS WE'D
BETTER SHOUT
FOR HIM, HUH?

YEP.

MUDDY!

MUUUUUDDY!

GROOONNK!

GRRRRHH!!





OH-HI! ARE
YOU MUDDY'S
MOM?

IT'S GREAT
TO MEET YOU!



CAN MUDDY
COME OUT TO
PLAY?

YEAH,
CAN HE?

WE KEEP WAITING FOR
THE BIG BROWN MAMA
BEAR TO ANSWER US.

I GUESS WE FIGURE A
MAMA BEAR SHOULD UNDERSTAND
US, EVEN IF A LITTLE ONE CAN'T.

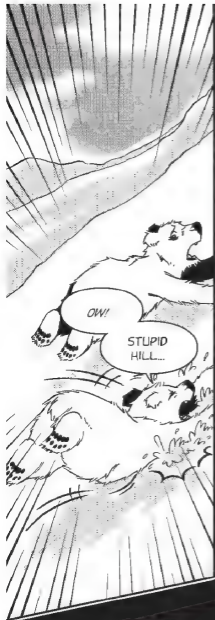
BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN IT HITS US BOTH
THAT BIG BROWN MAMA BEAR'S LOOKING
AT US LIKE SHE WANTS TO HURT US.



TAQQIQ...




RUN!



GRAAHRROOONK!





NO! NO,
STOP! STOP!


IT'S GONNA
BURY US!

MAMA!

MAMA,
HELP!



GHRROOAAARRRH!



GET AWAY
FROM MY
CLUBS!



NOW!






GRONK!



KALLIK?
TADQIQ?



HELP!
MAMA!



I'M COMING! DON'T
WORRY! I'VE GOT YOU..
I'VE GOT YOU..




I'VE
GOT YOU!



MAMA!
MAMA!




MAMA!
MAMA!




OH, MY
PRECIOUS CUBS...

MY BEAUTIFUL
LIGHTNING...MY HANDSOME
LITTLE MOON...




I'M SO SORRY FOR LEAVING
YOU! I NEVER THOUGHT A WALRUS
WOULD COME ALL THE WAY TO
THE DEN AND ATTACK YOU!

HOW DID IT EVER
KNOW YOU WERE HERE?



I KNOW TAQQIQ AND I SHOULD
TELL MAMA WHAT HAPPENED...
BUT WE JUST CAN'T.



I THINK ABOUT THE WORD MAMA USED
"WALRUS?" IS THAT WHAT MUDDY IS?

IT'S SO CONFUSING. WAS THE BIG
WALRUS ANGRY 'CAUSE WE'VE BEEN
PLAYING WITH MUDDY? AND DID IT
REALLY WANT TO EAT US?

MUDDY NEVER
WANTED TO EAT US!



I HAVE A HARD TIME
GETTING TO SLEEP...



...AND EVEN
WHEN I DO...



IT'S STILL BAD.

GROOONNK!



AAH!



THERE THERE,
LITTLE ONE.

DID YOU HAVE
A BAD DREAM?

YEAH...



I PROMISE, I'LL NEVER
LEAVE YOU AND YOUR
BROTHER ALONE AGAIN.

TOMORROW WE'LL
ALL GO ONTO THE ICE, AND
I'LL BUILD US A NEW DEN. WON'T
THAT BE EXCITING?

A NEW DEN WOULD BE GREAT...



...BUT IT JUST WON'T BE THE
SAME IF WE CAN'T PLAY WITH
MUDDY ANYMORE.







I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY
WALRUSES THERE ARE!



I TRY TO SPOT MUDDY
AGAIN...AND FOR THE FIRST
TIME, I CAN SEE PAST THE
BIG ROCK RIDGE.



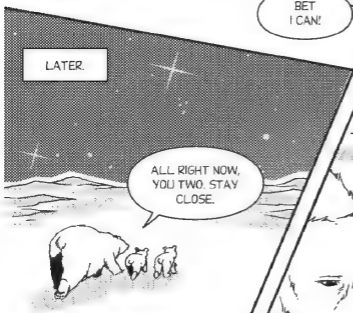
SURELY MUDDY'S OVER
THERE SOMEWHERE.



BUT I CAN'T SEE HIM. I HOPE
HE'S NOT TOO SAD WITHOUT
TAQQIQ AND ME.

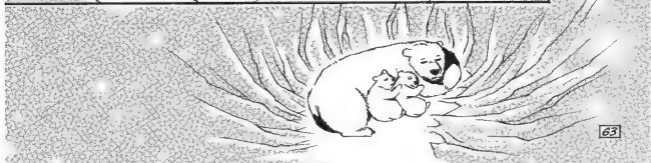
HE'S A WALRUS, AND WE'RE
WHITE BEARS...I GUESS THAT
MEANS WE CAN'T BE FRIENDS.








THANK YOU FOR
YOUR HELP. YOU'RE
RIGHT, YOU'RE BOTH
VERY STRONG!






TODAY YOU'RE BOTH
GOING TO LEARN THE BASICS
OF SEAL HUNTING.

STAY CLOSE TO
ME, WATCH WHAT I DO,
AND ABOVE ALL,
BE QUIET.



GOT THAT?

YES, MAMA!



NOW, YOU START
OUT BY FOLLOWING
YOUR NOSE.

"YOU'LL LEARN TO RECOGNIZE
THE SCENT OF SEAL."



HERE. THIS HOLE
IN THE ICE. CAN
YOU SMELL IT?

YEAH! IT SMELLS
LIKE...SALT WATER...

...AND
DELICIOUSNESS!



HA HA HA...
VERY GOOD.

NOW...YOU HAVE
TO BE READY TO
SMELL THE SEAL AS
IT'S COMING UP FOR AIR...



...AND YOU HAVE
TO BE PATIENT.

MAMA GETS SO STILL



IT'S LIKE SHE'S
TURNED INTO A BIG
LUMP OF SNOW.



AND I WANT TO PAY
ATTENTION AND LEARN, I
REALLY DO.



BUT THEN TAQQIQ
GETS ALL SQUIRMY.

HA HA HA!

HEE HEE!






THIS IS
SERIOUS, YOU
TWO.

SO GO! GET AWAY
FROM HERE, BEFORE
YOU SCARE AWAY
OUR DINNER!



C'MON, I'LL
RACE YOU!

YOU GOT US
IN TROUBLE,
YOU BIG ICE-BRAIN!



WELL, THAT'S
'CAUSE YOU COULDN'T
SIT STILL!

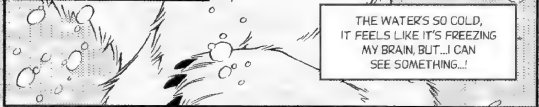


ME? YOU'RE
THE ONE WHO—

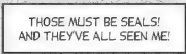





GLUB!



THE WATER'S SO COLD,
IT FEELS LIKE IT'S FREEZING
MY BRAIN, BUT...I CAN
SEE SOMETHING..!



THOSE MUST BE SEALS!
AND THEY'VE ALL SEEN ME!



OH, KALLIK, YOU CLUMSY,
FOOLISH THING...YOU COULD
HAVE DROWNED!



WELL, YOU'VE
GONE AND DONE
IT NOW.



HAKK!
HAKK!



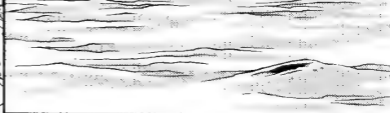
THE NEXT DAY I DECIDE I'M
GOING TO MAKE UP FOR RUINING
THINGS, EVEN IF IT WAS MOSTLY
TAQQIQ'S FAULT...

...BUT I CAN'T. IT'S SNOWING TOO
HARD FOR US TO LEAVE THE DEN. MAMA
SAYS IT'S CALLED A BLIZZARD.

AND IT GOES ON FOR
TWO WHOLE DAYS.

MAMA'S STILL UPSET. SHE DOESN'T
EVEN TELL US ANY STORIES ABOUT
THE STARS OR THE GREAT BEAR.

THE BLIZZARD FINALLY STOPS...



...AND I TAKE THE CHANCE TO
GO AND FIND US SOME FOOD.

HEY! I CAN SMELL SOMETHING!
SOMETHING FISHY!



BETTER NOT TRY TO CATCH IT
MYSELF, THOUGH. I DON'T WANT TO
SCARE ANYTHING OFF AGAIN.



I SMELL FOOD!

NOW, I MEAN
IT THIS TIME, YOU
TWO BE QUIET.



I GUESS THE WIND MUST HAVE
CARRIED THAT SCENT A LONG WAY,
'CAUSE IT FEELS LIKE WE WALK
FOREVER THROUGH THE SNOW.

BUT THEN...

SNIFF...
SNIFF SNIFF!

OUR PREY IS
JUST ON THE OTHER
SIDE OF THAT DRIFT.

I'M GOING
AROUND THIS SIDE.

YOU TWO GO
THE OTHER WAY, AND
CHASE IT TOWARD ME.

OKAY!

WE CAN
DO IT!

I ALMOST HOLD MY
BREATH. IT'S GOT TO BE A
NICE, PLUMP, JUICY SEAL...
NOW WHERE IS IT...?



MUDDY! WHAT'S
HE DOING HERE?



OH NO.



*MOM'S ABOUT
TO EAT HIM!*



RUN, MUDDY!

MOM, STOP!

ARKH?

GROONK!

GRRHHAAAARRRHH!

ARNKH ARNKH
ARNKH...!



NO, MAMA,
STOP! YOU'VE
GOTTA STOP!

WHAT?! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?!

GET OUT
OF THE WAY!

NO, MAMA,
NO, YOU CAN'T!

HE'S
OUR FRIEND!

GRRRRRHHH!!

NO, MAMA, NO,
NOT HIM! HE'S OUR
BEST FRIEND!

WHAT IS THIS
NONSENSE? THAT'S A
WALRUS! THAT WAS GOING
TO BE OUR DINNER!


YOU...HE'S...

"MUDDY?"

WE'VE KNOWN HIM
FOR DAYS AND DAYS!


HIS NAME
IS MUDDY!

...WHEN DID
YOU MAKE FRIENDS
WITH A WALRUS?



WE DISOBEYED YOU,
MAMA. WE LEFT THE DEN
WHEN YOU WENT OUT
TO GO HUNTING.

WE MET
MUDDY DOWN BY
THE BIG RIDGE.




AND WE THOUGHT
HE WAS A BEAR! AT
LEAST AT FIRST.

HE WAS REALLY
FUN, AND HE KNEW
THE BEST GAMES!




WELL...
I GUESS...

...I CAN'T BE ANGRY
WITH YOU FOR MAKING
A GENUINE MISTAKE.



I SHOULD HAVE TOLD
YOU ABOUT WALRUSES
RIGHT FROM THE START.


AND HOW
DANGEROUS THEY
CAN BE TO LITTLE
CUBS.



YEAH, BUT...WE'RE
DANGEROUS TO THEM,
TOO.




WHEN WE'RE
BIGGER, YES.



I TRY TO SEE WHERE
MUDDY'S GONE...SEE IF HE
MADE IT BACK TO THE REST
OF THE WALRUSES.



BUT I CAN'T EVEN TELL.



I HOPE I DON'T
HAVE TO EAT ANY MORE
OF MY FRIENDS.

THERE, THERE.

WE ALL MUST
EAT, LITTLE STAR.

IF WE ARE
TO SURVIVE.



BUT YOU SHOULD
BE PROUD TO BE A
WHITE BEAR!

WHEN YOU ARE
BIG AND STRONG,
NOTHING WILL TRY
TO EAT YOU!



YOU'LL BE
THE BIGGEST AND
STRONGEST
CREATURE OF ALL.



AND THAT
WILL KEEP
YOU SAFE.



BUT I WANT
YOU TO KEEP ME
SAFE, MAMA.

I DON'T WANT
HAVE TO SURVIVE
ON MY OWN.



DON'T WORRY,
PRECIOUS ONE.



I PROMISE...YOU
WON'T BE ON YOUR
OWN FOR A LONG,
LONG TIME.

UNTIL THEN,
WE'LL ALL BE
SAFE AND WELL
FED ON THE ICE...



...ONCE YOU TWO
LEARN HOW TO KEEP
STILL WHEN YOU'RE
WAITING FOR SEALS!



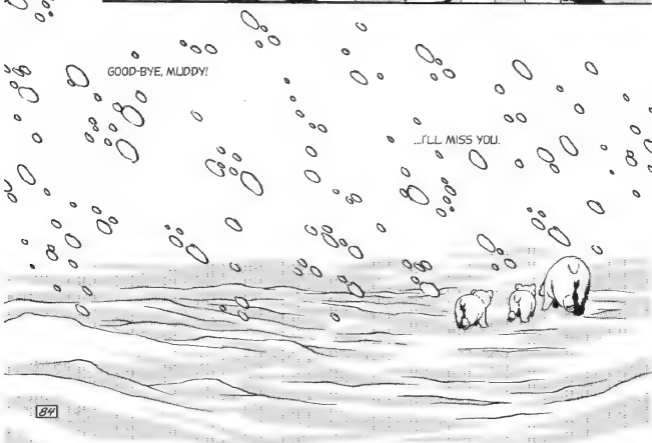
MAMA WILL KEEP US SAFE.
I KNOW SHE WILL.



I JUST HOPE MUDDY
STAYS SAFE, TOO.

GOOD-BYE, MUDDY!

...I'LL MISS YOU.



ERIN HUNTER

is inspired by a fascination with the ferocity of the natural world. As well as having great respect for nature in all its forms, Erin enjoys creating rich mythical explanations for animal behavior. She is also the author of the bestselling Warriors series.

Visit Erin Hunter online at
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DON'T MISS THE THIRD
SEEKERS MANGA:

SEEKERS

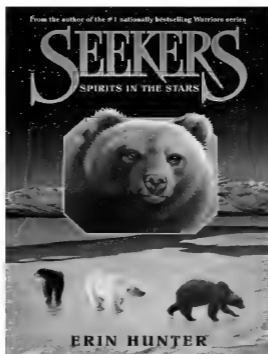
LUSA'S TALE

Black bear cub Lusa and her brother, Yogi, live in the Bear Bowl, a curious place with fences on all sides. Every day, strange flat-faces come to watch Lusa and her family over the edge of the Bowl. This is the world that Lusa knows, but Lusa's father, King, tells her stories of an outside world, one with no walls: the wild. King tells her that no bear has ever left the Bowl, but that doesn't stop Lusa from having some thrilling adventures as she tries to learn about the world beyond!

TURN THE PAGE FOR A PEEK AT

SEEKERS

SPIRITS IN THE STARS





CHAPTER ONE

Ujurak

Ujurak's legs ached as he tried to concentrate on just putting one paw in front of another. He and his friends seemed to have been trudging across the Endless Ice forever, though he knew that only a few sunrises had passed since they'd escaped from the flat-faces near the oil rig.

Glancing over his shoulder, he could see that his three companions looked just as tired as he felt. Toklo, the big brown bear, shambled along with his head down. Lusa stumbled after him as if she hardly knew where she was anymore, her small shape a black dot against the endless white; Ujurak knew they would have to keep a close eye on her, for fear that she would sink back into the longsleep. Even Kallik, who was more at home on the ice than any of them, padded along with a grim expression.

All around them the ice had been carved and twisted by the wind into strange shapes, which sometime's stretched over their heads into the sky. At first they had played

hide-and-seek among them; Ujurak let out a small huff of amusement as he remembered how good Lusa was at hiding, in spite of her black pelt. Sometimes they would slide down the frozen drifts, or look for shapes that reminded them of animals. Toklo had growled at an ice pillar that he thought looked like Shoteka, the grizzly who had attacked him at Great Bear Lake.

But we're too tired for games now, Ujurak thought. Too tired for anything except this endless slog.

His heart sank further as he made out a frozen ridge across their path, a wall of ice that disappeared into the distance on either side.

"Now what?" Toklo grumbled, trudging up as Ujurak slowed to a halt. "Don't tell me we have to climb that."

"We do," Ujurak replied. He could feel that they were drawing closer and closer to the spirit of his mother, and the tugging on his paws was too strong to be ignored. "This is the way we must go."

Once the big grizzly would have argued with him. Now he just let out a snort of disgust. "I was afraid you were going to say that."

"But how?" Lusa asked, stifling a yawn. She and Kallik had plodded up next to them. "It's so high and smooth!"

Ujurak glanced at Kallik for advice, but the white bear only shook her head in confusion. "There were no ridges like this where I lived with Nisa and Taqqiq."

"I'll go first," Toklo announced. "I'll try to scrape some pawholds in the ice for the rest of you."

Without waiting for the others to respond, he began clawing his way up the slippery slope. Ice splinters showered down as he dug his claws into the surface; Lusa crouched and wrapped her paws over her head. "Hey, that stings!" she protested.

"Come on, you'll be fine." Kallik nudged the small black bear to her paws again. "You go next, and I'll give you a boost."

Working her shoulders underneath Lusa, the white bear heaved her upward. Lusa scrambled up the slope in Toklo's wake, struggling to thrust her paws into the holes the bigger bear had made. She let out a startled yelp as she lost her grip and began to slide down again, her forepaws splayed out against the ice while her hindpaws scrabbled frantically. Ujurak let out a sigh of relief as he saw her drive her claws into a gap in the surface and start climbing again.

"You next," Kallik suggested. "I'll keep watch for danger."

Ujurak agreed, though he wasn't sure they had much to fear in this desolate landscape. He almost felt that they were the only living creatures left in the world.

By now Toklo had reached the crest of the ridge and turned to call back to his companions. "Come on! It's easier on the other side!"

Ujurak climbed quickly, his paws strengthened by the feeling that his mother was watching over them, and reached the top of the ridge just behind Lusa.

The small black bear flopped down, panting. "I thought we might be able to see land from up here," she said.

"But it's just more ice."

Gazing ahead, Ujurak saw that the ridge on this side sloped down gradually to an ice plain with a broken, choppy surface, like a frozen sea. The sky was covered with clouds, brightening to a milky radiance where the sun was trying to break through, and it was impossible to tell where the land ended and the sky began.

"We just have to keep going," Ujurak said.

As soon as Kallik arrived, shaking ice chips from her fur, they set off down the slope.

"I'm so tired my paws are falling off," Toklo grumbled, padding at Ujurak's side. "And my belly thinks my throat's been clawed out."

Ujurak pushed his snout into his friend's shoulder fur. "We'll stop to eat soon," he responded, trying to sound encouraging. "Kallik will hunt for us."

"She is good at that now," Toklo admitted. "Hey, Kallik, what about a nice fat seal?"

"Sure." Kallik raised her head, looking proud that Toklo was relying on her to provide for them. "Why don't you three rest, while I go and look for a seal hole?"

She paused, swinging her head around and sniffing—Ujurak guessed she was trying to sense the best place to start searching—then she plodded off across the ice.

Ujurak led the way to a twisted mass of snow that would give them some shelter against the wind that scoured the frozen plain. Lusa curled up in a hollow, wrapped one paw over her nose, and closed her eyes.

Toklo crouched beside her, scanning her anxiously. "I hope she's not falling into the longsleep," he muttered.

Ujurak nodded. Though Lusa had been more cheerful and active since they'd escaped from the flat-faces, he couldn't help worrying just as Toklo did. *She needs to reach land. We all do.*

The two brown bears huddled closer to Lusa, sharing their warmth, while they waited for Kallik.

"She'd better get a move on," Toklo remarked, shifting uneasily. "I'm starving!"

"Me too," Ujurak agreed.

"I'm sick of seal, though," the big grizzly went on. "What I wouldn't give for a fresh salmon, or a hare!"

Ujurak felt his mouth beginning to water, and his stomach rumbled at the thought. "I've heard Lusa muttering about grubs and berries in her dreams," he told his friend. "It won't be long now."

Toklo's only reply was a disbelieving grunt.

Ujurak couldn't help feeling optimistic. Awareness of his mother's presence tingled through him from his nose to his paws. But he didn't expect his companions to share his conviction. *They'll see*, he thought. *We must be near the end of our journey.*

Time dragged on, and Kallik did not return. Drowsily Ujurak let his mind drift back to the flat-face camp and to Sally, the young flat-face female who had been his friend. He remembered her dark hair and the laughter in her eyes, and the compassion she had shown when she was helping the animals who had been trapped in the oil. He remembered how

shocked she had been when she'd seen him change back into a bear.

I wonder what she told the others about how Lusa and I disappeared? And will she try to find us again?

A pang of regret throbbed through Ujurak. It was weird to be missing a flat-face, and he knew it was best for them not to meet again. But he did miss Sally's cheerfulness and her kindness.

I'm not a flat-face; I'm a bear . . . aren't I? Not long ago he had almost lost the sense of who he really was when he had spent too long in whale shape. He didn't want to risk that, ever again. *I'm a bear. And how would I explain myself to Sally if we met again?*

"Uh . . . Sally, you see I'm mostly a bear, but sometimes I'm a flat-face, or a bird, or . . ." he muttered out loud.

"Hey!" Toklo prodded him in his side, bringing Ujurak fully awake again. "Are you talking to yourself?"

"No, I was talking to Sally," Ujurak replied, not thinking how this might sound to Toklo.

"What do you want to talk to her for?" There was a tinge of jealousy in Toklo's voice. "She's not even here. And she's a flat-face."

"She's a good flat-face," Ujurak protested. When Toklo huffed angrily, the smaller bear stretched out a paw to touch his friend's shoulder. "But you're right," he murmured reassuringly, even though he couldn't understand why Toklo was getting so worked up over a flat-face they would never see again. "There's no point in talking to her."

Never again . . . he thought wistfully. She was so good and kind, but we don't walk the same pathways.

The sun had begun to slide down the sky by the time Kallik returned, dragging a seal behind her. Ujurak nudged Lusa awake, and the friends clustered eagerly around the catch.

"That's . . . er . . . great, Kallik," Ujurak said, trying to hide his dismay. The seal was the smallest he'd ever seen, not even fully grown. There wasn't nearly enough meat to feed all four of them.

"Yeah . . . brilliant catch!" Lusa added, but her voice sounded hollow.

Toklo just let out a growl as he tore off a chunk of meat.

"Don't say thanks or anything," Kallik muttered to him as they all crouched down to share the catch. "I waited *ages* for this!"

Lusa swallowed a mouthful of the seal meat. "We know you did your best—"

"It doesn't sound like it," Kallik interrupted, her voice rising in frustration. "If this isn't good enough for you, why don't you go and find some berries or hares?"

"You know we can't." Toklo rose to his paws, glowering at the white bear. "There's nothing here but seals! And ice! And more seals and more ice!"

He gave the remains of the seal a contemptuous prod with one paw and started to lumber away.

"Wait," Lusa cried, springing to her paws and scampering after him. "Come back! You're wrong!"

Toklo swung around and loomed over the little black bear. “Wrong, am I?” he challenged her. “If you’re so clever, then show me these other things.”

Lusa stretched out her muzzle toward him, a sudden intensity in her eyes. “*Listen . . .*” she breathed out.

Ujurak and Kallik exchanged a mystified glance. All the bears fell silent. Ujurak hardly dared to breathe. Then, far in the distance, he heard a faint barking.

“There!” Lusa exclaimed triumphantly.

“I suppose you’ve made your point,” Toklo grumbled as he plodded back to his friends, with Lusa bouncing alongside. “But what is it? And can we eat it?”

They all listened again to the faint barking. Ujurak thought he should remember what animal sounded like that, but the memory escaped him. “Is it seals?” he asked Kallik.

The white bear shook her head, looking puzzled. Then suddenly her eyes brightened. “Walruses!” she exclaimed.

“What?” Lusa’s eyes stretched wide with alarm. “They’re scary!”

Ujurak’s belly lurched, remembering the time that he and Kallik had been attacked by a walrus. Even with two of them to fight back, it had taken all their courage and strength to kill the fearsome creature.

“I know,” Kallik responded. “We’ll have to make sure we don’t get too near them. But walruses never go far out onto the Endless Ice. Hearing them means we must be near land.”

New energy flooded through Ujurak. With his friends hard on his paws, he scrambled and scampered over the ice

in the direction of the noise. But however hard they ran, the sound didn't seem to grow any nearer.

"It's much farther away than I hoped," Kallik said.

"The air is so still," Lusa panted as she struggled to keep up with her bigger companions. "Sound travels a long way."

Twilight gathered as the sun sank down and the short day came to an end. But the clouds were breaking up, and the full moon soon appeared, floating high in the sky. The ice glimmered silver under its pale light.

"Let's keep going," Toklo growled. "I don't care where, just so long as we get off this stupid ice."

"Ujurak, can you see any signs?" Lusa asked.

Ujurak halted briefly and scanned the sky, but there was no sign that the spirits were present, only a few faint streaks on the horizon.

"We've hardly seen the spirits since we left the oil rig," he said, half to himself. "Have they given up on us because we've taken too long?" He felt as if a stone were in his belly, pulling him down. "Are we too late?"

"Don't think that!" Lusa encouraged him, pushing her snout into his shoulder. "You can still feel your mother urging you on, can't you? And now we've found a whole new place to explore!"

She bounded off again, her short legs pumping determinedly, and Ujurak followed, catching up to Toklo and Kallik. But their days of journeying and lack of food were sapping their strength. They couldn't keep running for long.

Ujurak thought that the barking of the walruses was a

little clearer, but they were still a long way off when he realized that the bears were all too exhausted to carry on. Lusa had started to lag behind, blinking and shaking her head now and then as if she was trying to keep awake. Kallik was limping after treading on a sharp piece of ice, and even Toklo looked strained.

"We have to rest," Ujurak announced, coming to a halt. "The walruses won't go away."

His friends were too weary to argue. They found a sheltered spot at the foot of another ice ridge and curled up to sleep. As Ujurak closed his eyes, the barking of the walruses continued to echo in his ears, but the land still felt a long way off.

The whining of the wind and a raw chill in the depths of his fur woke Ujurak before the sun rose. Snowflakes whirled in front of his nose; the blizzard lashed his pelt and tore at his body with icy claws.

Beside him Toklo was crouching, with Lusa peering over his shoulder into the eddying snow. "Just what we need," Toklo grunted.

"We can't freeze to death now!" Lusa protested. "Not when we're so close to land. The spirits wouldn't be so cruel."

"We should dig into the snow," Kallik said, from Ujurak's other side. "That way we can keep warm."

For a moment Ujurak thought he was too exhausted to make a single scrape. But desperation gave strength to his paws. Together the four of them began to burrow into the

snow at the bottom of the ridge, hollowing out a den.

"Stupid blizzard!" Lusa exclaimed as her paws worked vigorously. "If it weren't for that, we could be on our way toward the walruses again."

She dug even deeper, her hindpaws throwing up a bank of snow behind her, while her head disappeared into the bottom of the hollow. Suddenly she stopped, letting out a startled yelp.

"What's the matter?" Ujurak asked anxiously, afraid that his friend had hurt herself.

Lusa's head popped up again. "Stones!" she squeaked. "Earth!"

For a moment Ujurak gaped at her in disbelief; then he crowded around with Toklo and Kallik to see what the small black bear had found.

Lusa was right. Instead of water, or snow, or more ice, at the bottom of the hole was a layer of gritty pebbles. Ujurak reached down and touched the rough surface, feeling it solid beneath his paw. Thankfulness flooded through him.

We've made it!

As the four bears stood together, too overwhelmed to speak, the bellowing of walruses broke through the sounds of the storm.

"I name this Walrus Rock," Lusa announced solemnly. Scrambling into the hole, she pushed forward her snout to snuff up the smell of the land. Ujurak and Toklo squeezed in beside her; Ujurak closed his eyes and drew the warm scent of stones and earth deep into himself.

"Well," Kallik's voice came cheerfully from the rim of the hollow, "maybe now you'll all stop complaining about eating seals."

Ujurak looked up again, seeing the white bear as a dim shape amid the whirling snow. As he clambered out of the hollow, he could see nothing in all directions except for the same snow-covered landscape they had journeyed over for what seemed like endless days.

Where are all the plants and animals? he asked himself. *How much farther do we have to go?*

Together they enlarged the hollow and huddled inside it while the storm screamed overhead. Two sunrises came and went while the wind whipped over the icy plain, driving the snow along with it.

Ujurak felt the pangs of hunger griping deeper in his belly with every day that passed, and he knew that his companions were suffering, too.

"It wouldn't be so bad if we couldn't hear the walruses," Toklo grumbled as the wind carried another gust of bellowing cries toward them. "I can smell them, too. I can't think of anything except for sinking my teeth into one of them."

Ujurak muttered agreement; he was hungry enough to risk attacking one of the savage creatures for the chance of gorging on the meat.

Kallik groaned and buried her snout deeper into Lusa's fur. All they could do was endure, and hope to sleep away the time until they could carry on.

At last Ujurak woke to silence. Raising his head, he

realized that the wind had dropped. The sun was shining; light reflected from the undisturbed covering of snow that blanketed the ice in every direction.

"Wake up!" Ujurak prodded Toklo, then Kallik and Lusa. "The storm is over."

He hauled himself out of the hollow as his companions woke up, blinking in the bright light and unfolding stiff limbs to follow Ujurak.

Lusa scooped up snow in her paws and rubbed it over her face to wake herself up. "Come on!" she called, bounding enthusiastically away from the den. "It's this way! Let's—" She broke off suddenly as the snowy surface gave way and her small black shape vanished into a drift.

"Oh, for the spirits' sake . . ." Toklo muttered.

He plodded over to where Lusa had disappeared, wading through the fresh, powdery snow. Ujurak watched, half amused and half anxious, as the grizzly plunged his snout into the drift and reared back with Lusa's tail gripped between his jaws.

"Hey, that hurts!" Lusa protested, paws flailing as she emerged with snow clotted all over her black pelt.

Toklo hauled her to the edge of the drift and let go. "Watch where you're putting your paws."

"And don't go running off," Ujurak added as Lusa shook snow from her pelt, scattering it around her in a wide circle. "We're not sure exactly where we are."

"How are we going to find out?" Kallik asked.

Ujurak concentrated, but he couldn't hear or smell the

walrus any more. *Just when it would be useful . . .* And the spirits were still not sending him any signs.

There's one way, he thought, but fear stabbed his heart, colder and harder than sharp splinters of ice. *But I might lose myself forever.*

As the silence dragged out, his fear was thrust aside by guilt. *I can't let my friends down,* he decided. *Not when there's something I can do to help.*

"I'll turn into a bird and fly," he said reluctantly.

"But you don't like changing anymore," Lusa objected.

"That's not the point," Ujurak replied. "It's something I can do, and maybe that makes it my duty." *And if I don't stay in that shape for long, I should be able to remember who I really am.*

Lusa padded over to him and touched her snout to his. "Thanks, Ujurak."

Warmed by the way that his friend understood his hesitation, Ujurak spotted the tiny shape of a seabird in the distance and focused on it. Moments later he felt himself shrinking, and he saw his brown fur vanish to be replaced by the sleek black feathers of a cormorant. His forelegs fanned out into wings, and his hind legs grew bare and skinny. Before his hooked feet could sink into the snow, he took to the air with a mighty flap and soared upward. He let out a harsh cry of triumph as the land fell away beneath him. In spite of his fear he felt the exhilaration of powerful wings bearing him up and the cold air streaming through his feathers.

But I'm a bear. I'm a bear, I'm a bear. I must never forget what I really am.

His friends shrank to three tiny shapes at the foot of Walrus Rock. Higher still, and Ujurak could see that they were on an island, surrounded by the frozen sea. He couldn't tell exactly where the land ended and the ocean began, but he spotted exposed cliffs, and places where it looked as if the snow had been blown to a thin layer. There were no trees, but a few scrawny bushes clung to the cliff face.

Ujurak circled the whole island; at the far side he spotted the walruses, a whole mass of them on a plain near the sea, packed tighter together than grubs under a rock. Swooping down, Ujurak let his gaze travel over their glistening brown bodies, their whiskered faces and curving fangs. He went so low that some of them jerked back their heads and snapped at him.

Oh, no, Ujurak thought, gaining height again with a single flap of his wings. You're not going to eat cormorant today!

The walruses' smell gusted over him; he looked down in disgust as they slithered fatly over each other like huge slugs. The babies never stopped squawking, and the bellowing of the full-grown males filled the air like thunder.

Ruck! I'll make sure I never turn into a walrus!

As Ujurak flew back over the cliffs, another cormorant dove at him, her wings folded back as she let out a loud alarm call.

"All right! All right, I'm going!" Ujurak called back, guessing that she had a nest somewhere close by.

Swiftly he flew back inland, pushing down panic for a moment as he wasn't sure of the way back to Walrus Rock.

Then he spotted the familiar twisted shape, with his three friends waiting patiently beside it.

The sun was setting as Ujurak landed in the lee of the rock and let himself change back into bear shape. At first he felt heavy and clumsy, and he missed the soaring freedom of flight, until the comfort of his brown bear shape flowed over him: This was the body he belonged in.

The other bears clustered around him excitedly.

"What did you see?" Lusa demanded.

Ujurak noticed that snow was sifted in her black pelt again. "What have you been doing, rolling in it?" he asked.

Lusa looked shamefaced, not meeting his gaze. "I fell into another drift," she admitted.

"Never mind that." Kallik pushed forward eagerly. "Tell us what you saw."

Ujurak described the island and the cliffs, and the stinking pack of walruses. "Far too many for us to think of hunting," he said.

Toklo looked disappointed, but he didn't argue. "What do you think we should do, then?"

"Make for the center of the island, the highest part," Ujurak replied, jerking his head in that direction. "We might find some bushes there and be able to scrape down to the ground. But it's getting dark. Maybe we should stay here tonight and set off in the morning."

"I'm sick of that den," Toklo growled. "Let's get going now."

"Yes!" Lusa added with an excited little bounce. "We'll be

okay traveling by night.”

Ujurak glanced at Kallik, then nodded. Toklo charged off in the lead as they set out for the middle of the island. Privately Ujurak felt that his friends were more confident about journeying in darkness because there was ground beneath the snow now, not ice or water.

“They feel they’ve come home,” Kallik remarked as she fell in beside him.

But they haven’t. Ujurak couldn’t shake off his misgivings. *None of us have. Maybe we don’t even know where home is anymore.*

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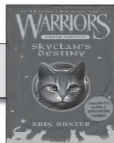
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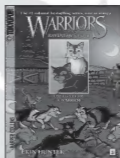
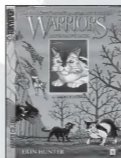
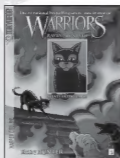
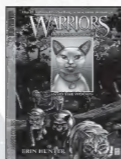
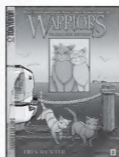
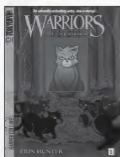
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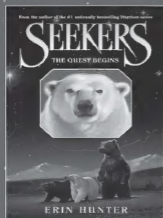


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